

## Article

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## **Family Domestic Violence: Impact on Children in Lusaka, Zambia**

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### **Authors' contributions**

*This work was carried out in collaboration among all authors. Author MM designed the study, performed the statistical analysis, wrote the protocol and wrote the first draft of the manuscript. Authors TK and GB managed the analyses of the study. Authors SOM and AM managed the literature searches. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.*

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### **ABSTRACT**

**Aim:** To explore the experiences of children exposed to domestic violence in Lusaka District, Zambia.

**Study Design:** A qualitative exploratory approach was adopted for this study.

**Place and Duration of the Study:** The study took place in Lusaka district over a period of 8 months. The study population included domestic violence survivor children and their parents. The study sample consisted of fifty-two participants divided into thirty children (boys and girls), sixteen parents or guardians, and six key informants. Data was collected using detailed interviews with children and key informants, while focus group discussions were conducted with the parents or guardians.

**Results:** The findings of the study revealed that children were exposed to different forms of

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domestic violence including physical abuse, emotional (verbal) abuse, and economic abuse. The children were both witnesses and victims of domestic violence. The study also revealed that exposure to violence had negative effects on the children such as physical injury, fear and anxiety, loss of confidence and self-esteem, academic under performance, guilt and shame, and poor relationships with peers and parents.

**Conclusion and Recommendations:** Domestic violence is still prevalent in Lusaka District and has negative long-term effects on children who witness it and are victimised by it. Interventions are necessary to address the size, nature, and complexity of the problem. It is recommended that professionals who have regular contact with families and children, including teachers, child care workers, health and mental health care providers, law enforcement officers, child welfare workers, and court officials should receive ongoing training on domestic violence and its impact on children, and necessary interventions to combat it.

*Keywords: Family; domestic violence; children; Zambia.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Domestic violence is a pervasive and frequently lethal problem that challenges countries and societies at every level and Zambia is no exception. It is mainly perpetrated by intimate partners and other family members manifested through physical abuse such as slapping, beating, arm twisting, stabbing, strangling, burning, kicking. Violence in the home is not limited by geography, ethnicity or status it is a global phenomenon [1]. Domestic violence has negative health consequences on victims, especially on the reproductive health of women. According to the World Development Report, domestic violence is a more serious cause of death and incapacity among women of reproductive age than cancer, and a greater cause of ill-health in comparison to traffic accidents and malaria combined [2]. WHO (World Health Organisation) estimates that 20 per cent to 50 per cent of women worldwide have suffered from some form of domestic violence at some point in their lives [3]. WHO, further states that domestic violence is the most common type of violence against women affecting 30 per cent of women worldwide [4].

Prevalence rates of domestic violence are high in Africa, even though the many government organisations have promised to promote full and equal roles of women in society. Domestic violence in Egypt remains a significant social problem [5]. In the Meskanena Woreda region of Ethiopia, 45 per cent of women were estimated to have been victimised by an intimate partner, and 10 per cent had been victimised in the twelve months preceding the study [6]. Odujinrin reports that wife beating has a prevalence rate of 31.4 per cent in Nigeria [7]. In the Kisii District of Kenya, the prevalence of physical abuse within

current relationships is approximately 42 per cent [8]. A twelve-month prevalence rate of wife abuse for Kigali, Rwanda, in 1990 was 21 per cent [8]. 40.4 per cent of Uganda's women residing in the Lira and Masaka Districts report being abused by a current husband or boyfriend [8]. In addition, research has documented that domestic violence is pervasive in South Africa despite government efforts to reduce its prevalence [9]. Seedat reports that in 1999 South Africa's female homicide rate was six times the global average, as four women were killed every day by men in their lives [10]. Half of these deaths were caused by intimate male partners, a phenomenon that has come to be termed as "intimate femicide".

A study by Ellsberg in Nicaragua revealed that up to a third of men who physically abuse their female partner also sexually abuse their children [11]. In some cultures, there are ritualised forms of child sexual abuse that often take place with the knowledge and consent of the family of the child, where the child is induced to engage in sexual acts with adults, whether or not in exchange for money or goods. For instance, a study conducted in Malawi by Masina revealed that some parents arrange for an older man, often called "hyena", to have sex with their daughters when they reach puberty [12]. A study on urban sexual behavior survey in Zambia found that men are considered higher status and women with low socio-economic status are limited in their ability to negotiate safe sexual relationships [13].

According to Follingstad & Dehart, emotional abuse, also called psychological abuse or mental abuse, is defined as any behaviour that threatens, intimidates, or undermines the victim's self-worth or self-esteem, or controls the victim's

freedom [14]. This can include threatening the victim with injury or harm, telling the victim that they will be killed if they ever leave the relationship, isolating them from others, and public humiliation. National Coalition against Domestic Violence state that emotional abuse may include conflicting actions or statements which are designed to confuse and create insecurity in the victim [15]. In addition, Kappler states that people who are being emotionally abused may feel that their significant other has nearly total control over them [16]. Isolation may damage the victim's sense of internal strength, leaving them feeling helpless and unable to escape from the situation. Victims often suffer from depression, which puts them at increased risk for suicide, eating disorders, and substance abuse. According to Urbana-Champaign verbal abuse is a form of emotionally abusive behaviour involving the use of language, which can involve threats, name-calling, blaming, ridicule, disrespect, and criticism [17].

In recent years, increased attention has been focused on children who may be affected by violence in the home, either as victims or as witnesses to domestic violence. A study done by Brown and Bzostek, reports that even when children are not direct targets of violence in the home, they can be harmed by witnessing its occurrence [18]. Children who are exposed to domestic violence can suffer severe emotional and developmental difficulties that are similar to those of children who are direct victims of abuse [19]. Exposure to domestic violence, particularly multiple exposures can interfere with the child's ability to think and learn and can disrupt the course of healthy physical emotional and intellectual development. A study in León, Nicaragua reports that children of women who were physically and sexually abused by their partners were six times more likely than other children to die before the age of five [20].

Similarly, children of physically abused women were more likely than other children to be malnourished and to have had a recent episode of diarrhoea, and less likely to have received oral rehydration therapy or be immunised. A study in the Indian states of Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh also found that women who had been physically abused were significantly more likely than non-abused women to have had a pregnancy loss due to abortion, miscarriage, stillbirth, or to have lost an infant. The study accounted for other influences on infant mortality such as mother's education, age, and parity [21].

According to Baker et al. children who are exposed to violence in their homes often have conflicting feelings toward their parents. The child becomes overprotective of the victim and sympathises with them [22]. Miller further states that the children develop anxiety, fearing that they may be injured or abandoned, worrying that the child's parent being abused will be injured, or that they are to blame for the violence occurring in their homes [23]. A Zambian study also showed that younger people were more likely to be at the risk of sexual behavior [24].

In addition, Stannard states that some children act out through anger and are more aggressive than other children [25]. Even in situations that do not call for it, children may respond with anger. Girls tend to internalise their emotions and show more signs of depression than boys. Boys are more inclined to act out with aggression and hostility. Walby & Allen theorise that children exposed to domestic violence at a very young age are likely to have social competency problems due to the damage done emotionally and maybe physically [26]. These children will always find it difficult to fit in social circles, possibly due to emotional disturbances such as low self-esteem, lack of self-confidence, insecurities. Children exposed to domestic violence prefer to stay isolated rather than be extroverted, exhibit violent tendencies in relationships, be excessively involved in social activities to avoid going back home, have difficulty in solving problems in a social group and, exhibit inability to trust others, especially adults.

Lundy & Grossman's study found that aggressive behaviour and possessiveness were common problems in children [27]. According to Lundy exposed adolescents are less likely to have a secure attachment style and more likely to have an avoidant attachment style, perhaps indicating that they no longer feel trust in intimate relationships. Reflecting on the findings of their research, Atkin speculated that abusive patterns in intimate relationships initiated in adolescence, may lead to violence on the part of men and victimisation on the part of women in their adult relationships [28]. Domestic Violence is also common in Zambia with a large number of married women experiencing physical violence, emotional violence and sexual violence [29]. The overall objective of the present study was to investigate the experiences of children who are exposed to domestic violence.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

The research was an exploratory study conducted using qualitative research methods. The study was carried out in Lusaka. The study sites were the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), Police Victim Support Unit (VSU) and The National Legal Aid Clinic for Women (NLACW). Access to these children was negotiated in a two-fold process, as the researcher met with key informants in the institutions to discuss the research, interview them and seek access to mothers who had used their service. The second phase was to negotiate access to the children by interviewing the mothers and gaining consent to interview their children. The key informants were identified by the institutions (social workers and counsellors).

The study population included children survivors of domestic violence and their parents. The study sample consisted of 52 participants divided into 30 children (boys and girls), 16 parents or guardians. Data was collected using detailed interviews with the children and key informants, while focus group discussions were conducted with the parents or guardians. Focus group discussions provided in-depth information on the topic under study and gave insight into the participant's experiences, feelings, knowledge and perceptions on domestic violence.

Data for this study was analysed using thematic analysis. The first step in analyzing the data was to get familiar with the data collected by thoroughly reading the text of the collected data paying specific attention to the patterns that emerged. Key themes and patterns that addressed the research questions were then identified and organised into coherent categories to help in summarizing and bringing meaning to the collected data. Informed consent was obtained from all participants and in the case of minors (children below the age of 16), consent was sought from parents or guardians. Voluntary participation and confidentiality were upheld. All participants participated voluntarily after receiving information on the study. The participants were reminded before the interview of their choices around what they were comfortable discussing and were informed that they could terminate the interview at any stage and should only talk about issues they were comfortable with.

## 3. RESULTS

Research findings from the study revealed that children were exposed to a wide range of domestic violence. The participants in the study often gave harrowing accounts of the nature of the domestic violence children were exposed to and offered insight into the volatile households many children lived in. The common forms of violence were physical abuse, emotional abuse (verbal abuse), and economic abuse, with physical abuse being the most common form of violence.

The study revealed that physical violence in homes is rampant and is an ongoing issue in the lives of many children. The children in the study gave accounts of the violence they had been exposed to in their homes. One of the child participants stated the following:

*My parents always fight at home. One day the fight was so bad that my father dislocated his arm. The fight started when my father refused my mother to go to a church conference for one week, because during this week we were expecting visitors in our home. After a bitter exchange of words my father slapped my mother who in turn pushed my father, who fell badly and broke his arm. I felt very bad because my father was in pain and was not able to work the way he used to before he broke his hand (12 years old boy).*

Further a 11 year old boy narrated that:

*"I had music on, but I could hear my mother shouting for help in the other bedroom. So, I ran to the room and found my dad beating my mum with a broom. He hit her so bad that the broom broke. He then started pulling her by the hair and throwing her against the wall and holding her by the neck shouting 'I will kill you'. It was horrible and I was so scared, I ran to the next door neighbours calling for help"*

Some of children remembered how they, along with their mothers, would at times leave their father and then go back to him later. A 10-year old boy, recalled:

*One minute they would be getting along and the other minute they would be fighting. We would even leave our house to live with my grandmother but after a few days my parents would reconcile and we would go back to our house, mum kept on taking him back. It was*

*terrible living like this because I was not sure what was going to happen next.*

A 12-year old also gave a similar response:

*My father is always beating my mother. At one time, he beat her so badly she broke her leg whilst trying to run away from him, this made my mother leave home for about a month, but she came back. Despite this, the fighting has continued. I'm scared because one day they will kill each other because my mother at times resorts to picking up anything in her reach to beat my dad just to protect herself.*

Some of the older boys and girls spoke about how they actively intervened to try and protect their mothers and younger siblings. They did so at great risk and cost to themselves, but they simply could not put up with the terror any longer. A 16-year old boy, described the day he could not keep it in anymore:

*One night whilst in my sleep I heard my father beating my mum, my mother was crying and screaming for help. I jumped out of my bed went to the kitchen and got a cooking stick so that I could hit my dad in an attempt to protect my mum, but in the process, I was beaten. This made me very sad because I was unable to go to school the next day as my hand was swollen.*

Mothers in the focus group discussions also reported a wide range of domestic violence. Most of the women reported to have suffered severe physical assaults in the presence of their children. A mother of three, aged between 6 and 15 years old, described the domestic violence her children had witnessed. She had been separated for several years when we interviewed her, and like many mothers, the violence continued despite the existence of barring orders that were supposed to protect her family. She narrated:

*He came in the living room and sat down and the two small ones came in when they heard me shouting for help as he started beating me, threw me around the room, saying that he couldn't control himself and he threw me straight into a chair and I hit my head of the back of the chair and started bleeding. This was not the first time such a thing was happening it happened frequently.*

Similarly, a mother of two children, aged 10-15 years old described an incident when she said:

*When my son then aged 9 years old was a victim of the father's rage and was forced to leave his bed in the middle of the night and seek refuge with relatives. The father's physical violence and intimidating behaviour produced frightening and dangerous outcomes. I recall an incident when her husband loaded his hunting gun while drunk terrifying herself and the children.*

Several mothers also reported violent episodes while they were holding young children, raising obvious concerns for their physical safety and child protection concerns. A mother of three children aged 2, 4 and 6 years old outlined an incident when she came home from hospital with her new born baby:

*My husband started screaming and shouting around the bed. Whilst I was holding the baby in my arms and I was feeding him, he (husband) jumped out of the bed and grabbed the baby and held him roughly such that his little head was hanging down and his legs were up. That was traumatic for me as I felt I could not protect my own child.*

Emotional abuse was the second common form of violence. Emotionally abusive behaviour directed at mothers and fathers in the presence of their children was reported. A 12-year old girl remembered such a situation when she said:

*We'd only hear, we wouldn't see her and it would upset us. It was quite annoying hearing him as well, because mum was shouting back. We didn't mind hearing mum, but when we heard him shouting it made us angry. It made it hard for me to concentrate at school as all the fighting would be ringing in my head even when I'd go to bed, I'd even cry sometimes.*

A 16 year old boy who was the eldest of three children spoke of the emotional trauma from the noise of the violence they overheard at night and said:

*We'd wake up at night and daddy would be yelling and shouting at mummy after coming home drunk from the bar. Me and my sisters would wake up and sense that something was going on, that there was something wrong with mummy. My siblings would start crying and I would start to comfort them assuring them that everything would be alright.*

For many children, overhearing the violence was the worst aspect, given that they simply did not

know what was happening to their mothers: Again, another respondent recalled the following:

*I'd wake up in the middle of the night and my father would be screaming with anger. My mother would be crying screaming for help and I would have to stay up listening to it and after a while I would hear a bang knowing that was my mother getting beaten up and that's what hurt me most.*

Emotionally abusive behaviour directed at mothers in the presence of the children was reported by many mothers. A mother of three children, aged 4-12 years old spoke of experiencing years of emotional abuse she and her children had suffered as pointed out by a child participant said:

*It was all verbal, anything from name calling to isolating me from my family telling me that I was crazy and needed counselling. Sometimes, he would walk in and he would call me all sorts of names such as you crazy cow, you stupid girl and all those horrible names in front of the children.*

She further went on to narrate that:

*One evening whilst my children were sitting and having tea my husband walked in and started telling the children, "look at your mother, she is a prostitute, she is useless", and she looked at the three of them they were crying.*

In another incident, a mother of four children aged between 18 months old and 8 years old described her ordeal as she said:

*He used to frighten the heart out of me especially when he was drunk. He said he was fed up of me and the little bastards (children) and that he was going to kill all of us beginning with me. Our eight-year-old son heard what my husband had said and he began to scream saying daddy please don't hurt mummy, please don't hurt mummy daddy we will do whatever you want us to do, just please don't hurt mummy.*

Fathers in the focus groups also described the emotional abuse they suffered at the hands of their wives in the presence of the children. During the focus group discussion, a 30-year old father of two children aged 10 and 8 years narrated that:

*I have been married to my wife for the last five years and I have been verbally abused by my*

*wife several times in the presence of my children. My wife has a short temper and is fond of lashing out at me over petty issues and sometimes for no apparent reason. One evening after a long day's work I got home tired just wanting to have a light meal, bath and sleep. Upon hearing that I was tired she began accusing and insulting me saying I know where you have been, you were having sex with another woman that is why you are tired. She called me all sorts of names saying "Mulamona kwati mulibaume" (you think you are man enough) just wait and see the type of man I will go after, someone rich and better than you.*

One of the other respondents a 35-year old man, father of two children aged 7 and 10 years old narrated that:

*I was involved in a car accident and got injured, I could not walk any more as I had lost sensitivity on my lower limbs. This led to me to lose my job as a driver. It is at this point I saw my wife's true colours. She began to treat me like a no body. I would go for days without bathing as she told me she was too busy looking for money because I could not provide for the family anymore. Seeing my distress and anguish, my 10-year old son, is the one who used to comfort me saying don't worry daddy you will be fine and you will soon start walking and will find another job. This made me feel very bad as I had married my wife in the village and brought her to Lusaka (city) only to find she is not what I expected her to be.*

The study further revealed that economic abuse is commonplace in many households. Some of the children interviewed verbalised that they got the feeling that their parents were unwilling to provide for the family as indicated by a 13-year old boy when he narrated that:

*I think my father doesn't care for us and it looks like we are a burden to him, to him we are just trouble. My father does not provide our family with food, most of the times we go to school without eating anything in the morning and our school fees are not paid on time so we are always chased from class.*

Similarly, a 15-year-old girl narrated:

*My parents are always arguing over money and do not even buy food at home. Most of the times I eat from our neighbours, sometimes I go out to look for some piece work in order to buy food.*

The participants in the study came up with several reasons as to why domestic violence existed. The reasons identified were alcohol abuse, arguments over children's needs, jealousy, and infidelity. Most of the children who participated in the study said that domestic violence in their families was as a result of alcohol abuse. A 15-year old girl narrated that:

*Whenever my parents have been drinking, there will be an argument about rent money and food, that the other is no longer paying rent or buying food. The argument would eventually lead to physical fighting with my mother being beaten.*

A 10-year old boy also narrated:

*Most of the time violence starts when my father comes home drunk, but when he is sober, he is quiet and doesn't fight with my Mum.*

Infidelity emerged as one of the reasons behind domestic violence. The older boys and girls were articulate in narrating their parent's extra-marital affairs and how these resulted into violence. A 16-year old girl narrated that:

*My father is fond of shouting at and beating my mother for no apparent reason. On one occasion my mother discovered that my father had a girlfriend, upon confrontation, my father began to beat my mother saying she had no right to question him over such matters. I pleaded with my father not to beat my mother, but he would not listen. He just kept slapping and kicking her. He beat her so badly that she fainted and had to be hospitalised.*

A 15-year old boy described a situation when he said that:

*I just heard my mother and father arguing on top of their voices. This made me become curious, so I went to sit by the door to hear exactly what they were talking about. I heard my mother asking my dad 'who is that lady I saw you with?' She was accusing my dad of having a girlfriend. My dad agreed that the lady was his girlfriend and there was nothing my mum could do to stop him from seeing her. This made my mum to become upset and they started fighting. After some time, my dad left the house and only came back three days later.*

Domestic violence is terrible to witness let alone live with on a daily basis, especially for children. There are many aspects of domestic violence

that affect the people involved and those that witness it. No matter what type of domestic violence occurs, everyone involved suffers. When children are a witness to domestic violence in any form, the scars from the events are left with them for a lifetime. The effects identified in this study were, physical injury, loss of confidence and esteem, fear and anxiety, educational failure and poor relationships with peers and parents. A 15-year old boy narrated that:

*My father was chased from work because of abusing alcohol. Ever since then he comes home drunk every day and is in the habit of beating my mum over simple issues. Sometimes he says he doesn't like what mum has cooked and in his drunken state starts spilling the food on the floor and beating my mother. I always try to defend my mother but my father ends up beating me as well. Last time he beat me up badly I started bleeding and had to be taken to the hospital to be stitched.*

A 15-year old girl recalled violent scenes involving her older brother aged 16 years old at the time when she said:

*My brother and dad used to beat each other because my brother used to get really annoyed with my father when he beat up my mother. One day he beat my mother badly because she forgot to buy bread from the shops. My brother started shouting at my dad to stop beating her and run towards my mother to shield her, in the process my brother was beaten on the eye and sustained a red eye.*

The study further revealed that children exposed to domestic violence were assaulted during or as part of the violence. The older boys and girls described how they involved themselves and intervened to protect their mother from their father's violence and were directly assaulted in the process. The study also revealed that children exposed to violence became fearful and anxious. A 14-year old boy narrated that:

*My dad drinks a lot of alcohol therefore anytime he goes out the fear would start then, and it doesn't stop until I know he is in bed asleep. None of us sleep at night when he is out. We would stay awake and try to intervene and protect our mum most of the time.*

The study revealed that domestic violence affected a child's relationship with peers. A 16-year old boy commented that:



*I never want to walk in the company of friends on my way home from school. I isolate myself from the rest of my classmates because if I walk with them, they might know that my parents like fighting, this can be embarrassing.*

In another interview an 11-year old boy said:

*I envy my friends who live in homes where there is no fighting and live together as one happy family. I just feel like it's not fair, all I want is a happy family. I don't want my friends to be laughing at me that my parents are not together anymore because they used to fight.*

#### 4. DISCUSSION

The study revealed that physical violence is an ever present issue in the lives of many children. Children spoke about a range of abusive behaviours that they had witnessed or had been victims of. For some children witnessing domestic violence meant seeing their parents physically being assaulted and witnessing their parents' physical injuries. In some instances, the study uncovered evidence of children themselves being direct targets of the violence. These findings are similar to research conducted in the United States by Levendosky et al. which revealed that children were often third party to the domestic violence and were caught between the fighting [27]. This observation was also confirmed in a British study by Schaefer as they were caught between all kinds of conflicts [31]. Similarly, a study in New York by Cohen et al. identified that children were frequently assaulted when they tried to intervene to protect their mothers during domestic violence [30].

The study further found that emotional violence, which involved threats, name-calling, blaming, ridicule, disrespect, and criticism were common. In addition, there were less noticeable aggressive forms of verbal abuse, which included statements that may have seemed caring on the surface but were thinly veiled attempts to humiliate, falsely accuse and manipulate others to submit to undesirable behaviour. In this study, a thought-provoking outcome around emotional abuse was that it was common in households where one partner was not working and dependent on the other for survival and also that this kind of abuse was directed to either partner in the presence of the children.

The findings of this study are echoed in a study conducted in Australia by Schaefer which

revealed that children were exposed to emotional (verbal) abuse especially in homes where only one partner was in employment and the other was dependent on the other for survival [31]. The research revealed that when one was not working, it put pressure on the other to make ends meet, leading to high stress levels. This in turn led to name calling, arguments, ridicule and even threats over issues such as accommodation, money, and food. Similarly, a research by Spilsbury et al. in Australia revealed that verbal abuse is more frequent where individuals experienced loss of wage-earning power [32]. The study also revealed that the abuse peaks during the Christmas season as parents faced pressures of paying bills and buying Christmas gifts. The frustration of the inability to make ends meet increased conflicts in the home, feelings of helplessness mounted, anger flared and in the face of inadequate coping mechanisms, violence erupted in the home.

The study also found that the excessive intake of alcohol often led to domestic violence. Various studies have revealed that excessive consumption of alcohol and other drugs were factors in provoking domestic violence. This extends from a parent acting violently towards their partner, or a parent emotionally, sexually, or physically abusing their child. A survey of domestic violence in Moscow revealed that half the cases of physical abuse were associated with the husband's excessive alcohol consumption. In a study on verbal abuse of children found that 52.5 per cent of the 120 people surveyed reported abuse at the hands of their alcoholic family member [32]. Those addicts who had greater mistrust and anger issues were more likely to commit violent acts than those without.

Similarly, a study by Ross in Scotland revealed that individuals who abused alcohol were more likely to subject their partner to domestic violence and abuse [33]. The study further revealed that intoxication due to alcohol caused an individual to become violent, resulting in an individual not considering the consequences of their actions. In addition, research reviewed by Ullman in Australia identified the potent presence of alcohol in the lives of parents who were abused [34]. Alcohol was understood and viewed as a causal factor in domestic violence and an additional adversity or stressor for the family to contend with. Exploring this further, Lipsky et al. in the United States revealed that a partner's alcohol abuse was established as a major contributor to domestic violence and was more closely linked to

murder, rape, and assault than any other substance [35]. Alcohol abuse was implicated in most homicides, and found to be a contributing factor to incest, child molestation, spousal abuse, and other family violence.

The findings of the study further revealed that children's exposure to domestic violence increased the risk of behavioural and social problems. Most of the children in the study did not want to get close with any of their peers because they wanted whatever they were going through at home to be kept as a secret. The study further revealed that children exposed to domestic violence developed a poor self-image, leading to children opting to spend time alone and lacking in motivation to explore the surrounding environment. In addition, the study revealed that exposure to violence made the children aggressive. The children felt that they need to fight to survive and resorted to hostility in resolution of conflicts with peers. The above discussion is supported by a study carried out by Kernic et al. in Canada which found out that children who had been exposed to violence had significant behavioural and social problems such as externalising behaviour, aggression and acting out and poor social competence [36].

Similarly, Baldry in an Italian study of elementary and middle school students, revealed that children exposed to domestic violence were found to be more likely to engage in bullying and/or be victims of bullying at school compared to those who did not witness violence, and more than twice likely to be involved in indirect aggression that is, spreading rumours and setting up another child for punishment [37]. However, this association was stronger for girls.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The present study explored the experiences of children exposed to domestic violence. The children in the study revealed a range of abusive behaviours they had witnessed. The common forms of violence were physical abuse, emotional abuse (verbal abuse) and economic abuse. The results from the study showed that emotional abuse was common in homes where one partner was not working and depended on the other for survival. The study also revealed that economic abuse was rampant in many households. In this study economic abuse involved parents not willing to provide for the family, misappropriation of money on alcohol and inappropriate allocation of money in the home. The study revealed that

some parents failed to provide for their children's material needs such as accommodation, food, clothes, and school fees. The participants in the study also came up with several reasons as to why domestic violence existed; the reasons identified were alcohol abuse, arguments over children's needs, jealousy, and infidelity. From the interviews in the study, it emerged that children of all ages knew that domestic violence was likely to follow when alcohol came into play.

Findings from this study align with other research findings, that although the effects of domestic violence on children can be individualised, some definite themes emerged. The level of fear and anxiety coupled with loss of confidence and esteem was very visible. Very distressingly the older boys and girls in the study spoke of physical injuries they suffered as they tried to protect their mothers from their father's rage, and academic under performance due to lack of concentration in class. The loss of confidence and esteem, and the impact that this had on the children and children's relationships with peers and parents was another theme that seemed to transcend different age groups. High HIV prevalence in Zambia could mean some of the children may experience delays in developmental milestones [38], and this could be compounded by emotional problems as a result of domestic violence. The study revealed that the older boys often resorted to aggression as a means of resolving conflicts with peers and tended to blame or hate their fathers for their own violence. Overall, the study has brought to light the experiences of children exposed to domestic violence in Lusaka district and has shown that domestic violence is an epidemic that tortures and maims- physically, psychologically, sexually, and economically. Children exposed to domestic violence must have places to go to that are safe and supportive, whether it be with extended family or at a domestic violence shelter. Children need to know things can change and violence at home can end. Children need a hope for the future.

## CONSENT AND ETHICAL APPROVAL

First and foremost, all participants were informed about what the study was all about and they were told from the very outset that their participation in the study was voluntary and that they were free to answer or not to answer any question. Further, they were told that they were free to withdraw from the study at any time they wished. Participants were also assured of

confidentiality of the information that they were providing. In this study, the names of the participants were not disclosed. Permission to record the conversation was obtained from the participants prior to both the focus group discussions and detailed interviews. As per international standard, parental written consent has been collected and preserved by the author(s).

## COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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